

***Health Disparities Research:
Contributions of
Health Services Researchers
from
Historically Black
Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)***

**Maryland's Fourth Annual Statewide
Minority Health Disparities Conference**

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Eleanor A. Walker, PhD, RN

Health Disparities

- **Defined as differences in health status between members of minority groups and the majority population**
- **Health disparities have existed for more than 500 years**
- **The reasons for the existence of health disparities are varied:**
 - **Racism and discrimination**
 - **Access to health care**
 - **Lifestyle**
 - **Economic Conditions**
 - **Health insurance**
 - **Health Status**
 - **Educational Attainment**
- **The goal today should be to continue to identify and implement strategies to eliminate health disparities and contribute to healthy lifestyles**

HBCUs and Health Disparities

Early Documentation of Health Disparities

- **1904**
 - The health status of African Americans was documented by W. E. B. DuBois
 - The Health and Physique of the Negro American
- **1914 Booker T. Washington**
 - Initiated Health Improvement Week
 - National Negro Health Week

HBCUs:

Historical Perspectives

- **The majority were established in the late 1800s after the Civil War as a direct result of racism**
- **Purpose: To educate African Americans and to maintain segregation**
- **Three HBCUs: Cheyney University, Lincoln University and Wilberforce University existed prior to the Civil War**
- **After the Civil War there were more than 200; since that time the number decreased by almost 50%**

HBCUs:

Historical Perspective

- **Today, there are slightly more than 100 HBCUs.**
 - **public and private two and four-year schools**
 - **graduate and professionals schools.**
- **HBCUs comprise 3% of all institutions (4,084) of higher education in the United States, but enroll 14% of African American students. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)**
- **Among the top 12 institutions graduating African Americans who earn PhDs, 10 are HBCUs.**

HBCUs:

Historical Perspective

- **HBCUs produce the majority of the black middle class:**
 - **30% of blacks who hold doctorates**
 - **35% of black lawyers**
 - **50% of black engineers**
 - **65% of black physicians**

(St. Petersburg Times on line, 2003)

HBCU Health Services Researchers

- **Valuable untapped resource in the effort to eliminate health disparities. Left out of the loop! Not at the funding table!**
- **Vested interest in reducing health disparities.**
- **Participate in labor intensive research studies in order to reach communities and individuals that have not been reached in the past.**
- **Unique expertise, knowledge, and sensitivity necessary to address the health issues of African Americans.**

HBCU Health Services Researchers

- **Capable of conducting research that defines the research question from a culturally normative perspective.**
- **Experienced in collecting and interpreting data based on African American values and norms.**
- **Understand how to study health seeking behaviors of African Americans which are often influenced by folklore and use of home remedies.**

HBCU Health Services Researchers

- **Understand the importance of interpreting their findings in culturally appropriate terms**
- **Understand the necessity of sharing findings with those who participated in the research as well as professional audiences**
- **Have longstanding relationships with the community that precede funding and often continue when funding is depleted**



**National Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Research Network
for Health Services and Health Disparities**





National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Research Network for Health Services and Health Disparities

- **Established 1996**
- **Partnership with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)**
- **Goal: Reducing health disparities through health services research focused on interventions with African Americans.**
- **Research funded by CMS over the past 10 years**

HBCU Research Network for Health Services and Health Disparities

About the Research Network

- **Individual membership organization**
- **Work to strengthen the health services/health disparities research skills of HBCU investigators**
- **Collaborate on health services research projects**
- **Share resources**
- **Educate legislators and government officials about the research findings of HBCU health services/health disparities researchers**

Health Disparities Research by HBCU Health Services Researchers

- **Is not an academic exercise – it is labor intensive**
- **Requires primary data collection**
- **Requires health services researchers recognized as ‘authentic voices’**
- **Findings may contribute to reduced health care costs**

Selected Findings from Health Services Research Conducted by HBCU Investigators

- **African Americans care about their health.**
- **A major contributing factor to health disparities among African Americans is lack of knowledge.**
- **Providing education, support and follow-up are effective strategies to foster health behavior change among African Americans.**
- **Partnering with community-based organizations, non-traditional organizations, and churches is an effective strategy for reaching African Americans.**

Selected Findings from Health Services Research Conducted by HBCU Investigators

- **Persons eligible to participate in screening and preventive care services have taken advantage of the opportunity.**
- **The message that preventive care can result in early detection, treatment and in some cases, cure has become more accepted.**

Selected Findings from Prostate Cancer Studies

- **Primary reasons African American men do not seek screening:**
 - **FEAR**
 - **Feeling of powerlessness to treat**
 - **Difficulty discussing health issues**
 - **Denial (it will happen to others, not me)**
 - **Belief that it is related to sexual activity**

Selected Findings from Prostate Cancer Studies

- **Many men are not aware of their options for screening, diagnosis and treatment.**
- **Health care providers must provide clear information about risks, screening, and treatment.**
- **Environments must be created where African American men feel comfortable sharing personal feelings and fears.**

Selected Findings from Prostate Cancer Studies

- **When individuals access screening services, other health concerns may be discovered early.**
- **Education works!**

Selected Findings from Breast Cancer Studies

- **Reasons for not using mammography services:**
 - **No symptoms, therefore not needed**
 - **Fear of finding a problem they could not cope with or pay for**
 - **No insurance**
 - **Not aware of risk factors associated with breast cancer**
 - **Lack of knowledge about breast cancer in general**

Selected Findings from Breast Cancer Studies

- **Education about mammography screening and breast self-examination resulted in increased participation in both activities.**
- **Barriers to participation (distrust of medical tests, lack of time and embarrassment) were reduced.**
- **Group based interventions may have a significant impact in areas where there is a high level of mistrust.**

HBCUs and Health Disparities

Outcomes from Intervention Research

- **Reached more than 15,000 African Americans over the past ten (10) years**
- **Identified systemic and personal barriers to health care among African Americans**
- **Increased access to care among African Americans**
- **Increased knowledge about self-management of diabetes**

Reducing Health Disparities

Conclusions

- **Paradigm shift is essential; we must move from describing the problem to identifying and implementing interventions that contribute to solving the problem.**
- **Increase knowledge and awareness of individuals about health disparities; why screening is necessary; assist with behavior change.**
- **Provide access to the health care system for early diagnosis and treatment; assist by navigating through the system**

Reducing Health Disparities Conclusions

- **Include health services researchers from HBCUs**
- **Increase funding targeted for HBCU investigators**
- **Funding for multi-site research projects**
- **Expand thinking about HBCUs to include health services/health disparities research in addition to education**
- **Education, Support, and Access to Care Work!**

HBCUs and Health Disparities Recommendations

- **HBCUs must be at the decision making table**
- **Funding must be targeted for HBCUs**
- **Must have their research proposals reviewed by individuals engaged in health services/health disparities research**
- **Fund health services/health disparities research focused on interventions**
- **Change the paradigm: Implement the model developed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)**
 - **Partner with HBCUs**
 - **Target dollars for research to HBCUs**